

10 MAY 2003

Mahathir-Election

I'LL NOT LEAD BN IN NEXT ELECTION, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, May 10 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today reaffirmed his decision to step down as Prime Minister in October and will not lead the Barisan Nasional (BN) in the next general election.

Speaking to reporters after opening the MIC 57th annual general assembly here, Dr Mahathir however said that he had yet to decide on the election date.

"I've not made up my mind (on the election). I'll keep you guessing...that's more fun. Otherwise, you'll have nothing to think about," said Dr Mahathir, who is BN chairman.

Nevertheless, Dr Mahathir gave an assurance that he would give his fullest support to his successor who would lead the BN in the general election.

He said that despite announcing his decision, some people still refused to believe that he would step down as Prime Minister, Umno president and the BN chairman.

"And, there're others who want me to step down earlier, to make sure I'll go," he said.

Asked to clarify on that remark (that people wanted his earlier departure from office), Dr Mahathir said: "This is speculation. This is politic. We get these kind of things. They are very suspicious of me and have not been supportive."

Earlier in his speech at the general assembly, the Prime Minister said that some believed that a change in leadership every now and then signified democracy.

"If the people wish to have the same leader, the leader can stay on. But if he (the leader) wishes to retire, you must allow him to retire," he said, in an apparent reference to his own decision to step down this October.

Dr Mahathir announced the decision to step down when winding up the Umno general assembly on June 22, last year, catching everyone at the Putra World Trade Centre's Dewan Merdeka and the nation by surprise.

But, after much persuasion, he agreed to stay on until October this year.

Returning from a two-month holiday this week and speaking to reporters last Thursday in Bintulu at the opening of the Petronas liquified natural gas complex, Dr Mahathir, in responding to calls for him to withdraw his decision, said: "I've made a decision and will stick by my decision."

Touching on his speech today calling for all BN component parties to close ranks in facing the coming general election, the Prime Minister said that there were bound to be problems in each component party, including competition for positions.

"The MIC is settled, so I think we should set aside misunderstanding among us to focus on the election.

"All the component parties of the BN need to prepare for the election, get rid of internal problems and stand solid behind the BN," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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